

Community-Wide Crisis Preparedness: School Action for Emergencies (SAFE)

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The Harrison County, West Virginia, Board of Education is developing the nation's first school safety program in which emergency responders will access the video from school cameras, using their laptops while enroute, onsite, and from the county command center. Project SAFE – School Action for Emergencies – is an innovative approach to providing real-time, onscene video to first responders, incident commanders, and the centralized communication center. As stated by the grant recipient:

Everywhere there are schools; and schools everywhere have security concerns; and the protection of our children is a universal goal. Safety in the schools is no longer taken for granted following the recent shooting in schools around the US. In addition, terrorism is on the collective mind of Americans since the 9/11 disaster.



The concern for another “Columbine” at the Harrison County level has been an impetus for this project. Results of a survey of 811 6th, 9th, and 12th graders in the county reported students carrying guns to school, taking part in gang activities, being afraid that another student would hurt them at school. Other risk factors present in the county include three potential terrorist targets: the FBI Criminal Justice Information System national fingerprint identification center, the large, underground national, natural gas storage reservoir, and a power plant that supplies electricity to the Washington, DC, areas.

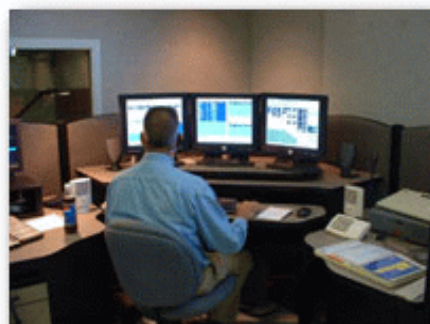
The expected outcomes of the project are to: provide a replicable model for county, state, and national applications; provide a system for retrieving video information from the school to a distant location; increase the safety of students and faculty; and establish a new community network by creating links between community groups such as parents, students, school workers, the FBI, law enforcement, rescue squads, fire departments, social service agencies, and business.

The Harrison County Board of Education project will provide first responders with access to broadband technology that brings video images via very high-speed communication directly to them in real time. While surveillance cameras have been installed in many schools nationwide, their potential for providing valuable information in an emergency has not been tapped. The innovations introduced by Project SAFE include:

- Mobile wireless technologies to provide emergency responders maximum flexibility using either laptop or PDA;

- Providing the technology to all emergency responders in the county, the information is exchangeable across organizational boundaries, (e.g., town, county, state and fire, law enforcement, emergency) in a seamless and secure manner that facilitates a coordinated reaction to a crisis.

A major advantage of Project SAFE is the partnerships established between the Board of Education and all first responders in the county. According to the grantee, “This systemic change achieves a new level of interdepartmental and inter-jurisdictional cooperation so that information



is exchanged across organizational boundaries in a seamless and secure manner allowing for a coordinated reaction to the crisis.” The partnership includes 11 law enforcement agencies (town, city, sheriff, and state), two emergency partners, ten fire departments, American Red Cross, and the FBI. State partners involved are the West Virginia Department of Education, Office of Technology and Information and the West Virginia Governor’s Safe Communities Program/Highway Safety Program.

Project SAFE has a potential audience in several areas: school safety, community development, security surveillance, and emergency response tactics. This small investment of \$442, 704 should produce many returns with regard to critical crisis preparedness in our communities.